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Spring 1865: The Closing Campaigns of the Civil War

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Review

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Jamieson, Perry D. *Spring 1865: The Closing Campaigns of the Civil war.* University of Nebraska Press, \$34.95 ISBN 9780803225817

An Authoritative Volume on the War's Closing Campaigns

The sesquicentennial of the Civil War is now in the books (so to speak), providing winded readers a chance to digest the smorgasbord of literature that publishers have recently offered scholars and enthusiasts. In addition to academic works on the end of the conflict by Elizabeth Varon and Gregory Downs, a slew of first-rate campaign studies on Petersburg, Sherman's March, and the closing actions in Virginia and North Carolina now grace the bookshelves of anxious military history readers. Perry D. Jamieson steps to the forefront of this tide with *Spring 1865*. Jamieson, who serves as senior historian emeritus of the U.S. Air Force, will be well-known to Civil War readers as co-author of the landmark *Attack and Die: Military Tactics and the Southern Heritage* (1984) and author of a sweeping analysis of the U.S. Army's tactical and doctrinal changes in the wake of the war, *Crossing the Deadly Ground: United States Army Tactics, 1865-1899* (1994). Jamieson's *Spring 1865* is the latest addition to the University of Nebraska's "Great Campaigns of the Civil War" series, and like its predecessors, the book is a masterful synthesis of the prevailing historiography, sprinkled with enough insight to make it a valuable contribution to the field in its own right.

Spring 1865 takes the reader from the fields and trenches of Petersburg to the rain-swept beaches of North Carolina and the swamps of Sherman's march to Columbia. The ground will be familiar to most readers, but rarely has the story been told so well. Jamieson commands the enviable ability to move between the strategic and tactical pictures almost seamlessly, on one page discussing the political imperatives for seizing Fort Fisher before detailing soon afterward how Union soldiers under Col. Joseph C. Abbott launched a desperate night attack. He draws on all the best works of scholars who have covered these battlefields

before him, including Hess, Simpson, Bradley, and Grimsley. A key takeaway is Jamieson's convincing discussion of how the Confederate high command quickly unraveled as April approached, with Jefferson Davis living in his own world on the one hand and Joseph Johnston fighting for better peace terms on the other. He shows that Davis' much-misunderstood April 4 message to the Confederate people that the war had entered a new phase was not meant as a veiled appeal for guerrilla warfare. Instead, it was simply the last desperate appeal of a statesman in denial to recover his nation's morale. Another welcome undercurrent in the book is its emphasis on weather as a critical factor that complicated the course of operations in every theater.

The series editors begin Jamieson's study with the warning, not necessarily new but worth repeating anyway, that traditional military history should be learning from the best that "nonmilitary perspectives" have to offer. Social and cultural analysis should be part and parcel of battle narratives (think George Rable's *Fredericksburg! Fredericksburg!*). Most of Jamieson's sources are of course secondary and fall into the camp of what could only be called traditional military history, but he does draw on the pioneering work of others who blend the old and new. In the case of *Spring 1865*, these perspectives offer proof of the steady disintegration of Confederate chances, even as the fortitude of some in gray remained strong. To illustrate the plight of the common soldier, Jamieson draws on the work of J. Tracy Power and Joseph Glatthaar showing the myriad social and political reasons for widespread desertion in Robert E. Lee's ranks. To blend the traditional battle narrative with new insights on desertion, Jamieson shows that the stand-up pounding A.P. Hill's corps leveled against Gouverneur Warren's Fifth Corps at Hatcher's Run on February 6-7 briefly arrested the declining spirits and rising desertion level in the Confederate ranks. But of course this resilience was only momentary. To demonstrate the potency of this wider desertion problem, Jamieson adopts Gary Gallagher's contention that Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia were the principal source of Confederate national identity. Thus, when Lee's army came apart, the nation came apart. The author also discusses politics and soldier motivation among Union volunteers, noting that constant exposure to the institution of slavery softened the prejudice of many of Sherman's volunteers just as it hardened their resolve to crush the Confederacy.

Readers looking for an authoritative single volume on the campaigns that ended the Civil War will want to consider *Spring 1865*. Jamieson proves himself an able master of the narrative who never discards his penchant for strong

analysis. As a balanced synthesis of the best interpretations available, it is a welcome addition to the "Great Campaigns" series.

Zachery A. Fry is a Ph.D. candidate at Ohio State, where he is finishing a dissertation on emancipation and the political culture of the Army of the Potomac. He is also writing articles on the effects of weather and disease on the Union occupation of Harrison's Landing in 1862, and on the process by which white soldiers transferred to command posts in the United States Colored Troops.